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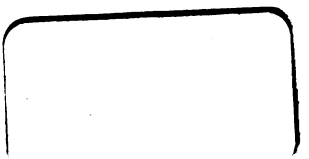

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The Marshlands.

A Souvenir in Song of the Land of Evangeline.

BY

J. F. HERBIN.

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Prof. Wm James.
with compliments
of the Author

September 27th 1897

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THE MARSHLANDS.

BY

J. F. HERBIN,
Author of "Canada, and other Poems."
Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

WINDSOR, N. S.
J. J. Anslow,
1893.

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Mrs. Hiram B. Lovington
Cambridge

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year 1893,
by J. F. Herbin, at the Department of Agriculture.

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These are but sketches of the common way,
Caught from the phases that have held me long,
Near the green marshlands, and the red tides strong;
Whose fleeting picture-glory I would stay.

These are but glints from a light-flooded day,
Whether in picture, or in simple song:
My teacher hath been kind nor led me wrong
Through seasons of calm labor and display.

The purpose of my pictures would not show
Only that life hath pleasure for the eye.
My lines would point the way into the heart
Of all this glory, which will set aglow
Thy passing days; until the rhapsody
Of wakened life of thee becomes a part.

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THE MARSHLANDS.

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ACADIA.

This is a land of legend; every mount
A story has, would hoary shades recount.
There is no valley, marsh, or misty shore,
Without the charm of mystery and lore—
Where rivers mute with wonder yet might tell
The whole to him who waits and questions well.
The lakes have stories for the kindly ear;
So utter oft their names, and thou wilt hear:
Unwritten histories of time and men,
Of love and craft await the willing pen.
And only will the mountain to the sky
Give up its legend and its mystery,
When whisper-winds with sun or fog drop low—
If trusting ear be there, it too may know.
When night shall leave the vales, and day is gone,
The lone wanderer is not all alone.
Upon the river do the murmurs hide
Some greeting for the coming of the tide.
Afar the waters rise, beyond the crest
Of wooded hills; and with a panting breast
The great sea comes athirst with mighty leap;
And brushing fierce against the bluff and steep,
Like a wild courser, sweeps the sandy plain;
And leaping off into the depths again
Whirls with a mighty speed the curving course;
And with a final plunge it comes to rest—
The murky waters from the distant west,
And the blue river at the ancient tryst,
Flow on together;—be thou there to list.

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The legends of the lake the isle will tell;
An age of vigil hath the sentinel.
Heed not the laughing loon; there is a voice
Whose tell sometime will make thy heart rejoice.
And the coy spirit found or night or day
Upon some shore, may then not fade away.
Mayhap when Night is silent, and the break
Of winging Time stirs not the sleeping lake;
And for brief space no voice comes from the wood;
No step but thine in all the solitude;
No eye but thine to view the darkness stern;
The mystery may be read if thou wilt learn.

So for thine ear, a voice is everywhere,
In forest, dykeland, sea, and speaking air,
If thou shalt love and wait; a written scroll
To please thy heart and stir thy ready soul;—
For this is in the land of Acadie,
The fairest place of all the earth and sea.

NOVA SCOTIA.

Nouvelle Ecosse, fair province of the sea,
Almost an island with thy lakes and woods,
Thy rivers find the tides of many moods;
And fair is every season's change with thee.
Through all these days of lightsome harmony,
No place in all thy dreamy solitudes;
No hill, or slope, or plain of rural roods;
No rock or shore, but stamps the heart of me.

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DEPARTURE.

Long have I lingered where the marshlands are,
  Oft hearing in the murmur of the tide
  The past, alive again and at my side
With unrelenting power and hateful war.
Here in the calm of dykes that spread afar
  Their summer green, or winter snow, hate died,
  And burning rage, in peace that bids me bide;
In steadfast love that guides me like a star.
Ye summer meadows, and ye winter plains,
  That knew my hapless race, I go
    As one who lived beneath his father's roof;
Who heard at eve the slow-returning wains;
  The far, soft melody of bleat and low;
    The nearer noisy shuttle in the woof.

WOLFVILLE.

Lolling on a hillside dark with wood,
  And orchards ripe and red, she lovely lies.
  Her spreading folds of dress of many dyes
Trail in the waters of the murmuring flood.
About, the mountains ages old have stood
  And watched her grow. From the dawn-rays that rise,
  To evening melting into farther skies,
The sun o'er-arches her beatitude.
Here Beauty, Peace, and Knowledge, closely tied,
  Assert a happy sway 'mid sylvan scene.
    The fresh salt breezes mingle with the smell
Of clover-fields and ripened hay beside;
  And Nature, musing happy and serene,
    Hath here for willing man her sweetest spell.

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RENEWAL.

Beauty comes again new-born and pure,
With virgin comeliness. No wrinkle-line
Cuts her fair face, and calm her glances shine,
Unshadowed by regret. No thoughts allure
Remembrance of the past, for days endure
But while they live. Ever in soft recline,
To all attendant joys she maketh sign,
To fill her cup with draught whose sweet is sure.
"Where Pleasure rests," she says, "is Beauty too."
And on their kiss Maturity takes wing
To scatter tears and death. The flowering grass
She treads is soft; never a sky so blue
And air so balmy, for her lips have sung
No sorrow yet; nor weeping sighed, "Alas!"

A DREAM.

A sunbeam fell upon my drowsy eyes;
And soon within my veins its fluid gold
With glad monitions through my being rolled.
Dull days had hung like curtained mysteries,
And nights were weary with the starless skies.
At once came life, and fire, and joys untold,
And promises for violets to unfold;
And every breeze had shreds of melodies,
So faint and sweet. Upon the marsh late sere,
Broke green and rippling grass and blossom-rays.
Along with Beauty came full floods once more
Of gladsome hours, leaving their pleasure near
On every sign of death; and all the ways
Brimmed with abundance where the beams down-pour.

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BOBOLINKS.

A flash of gold and jet, then bubbling throats
From meadow-fence and dike fill up the breeze.
List and bethink! These are not reveries
In song, nor passion shaped in silver notes.
The warble's expectation never floats
Beyond the reach of wing. The melodies
Seek not the past, nor pierce futurities.
These happy spirits wrapped in glossy coats
Hear Nature's gentle calling and reply.
Canst thou not see, within each feathered thing
There is a life that looks nowhere beyond
To unattempted songs and heights of sky?
In each quick moment, eager voice and wing
Find Life's sweet acme holding breath in bond.

THE FIRST ROBIN.

A robin came to-day with earliest dawn,
And whistled through the orchard-avenues,
Birdless and bare, and dull with clinging dews.
From tree and shadowy fence the plumage shone
Of this sole singer; while through lane and lawn
He called in vain for answer to the news
He brought to-day among the misty views;
Until his whistle and his wing were gone.
The piping said not whence, or why he came;
Before a bud is broken on a tree;
While yet the brooks are icy, and the cold
Clings to the earth. His breast was like a flame
In the dull morn; his calling seemed to be
For Life, not yet awake in field and wold.

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AN ACADIAN AT GRAND-PRÉ.

To-day alone of all my scattered race
I see again the beauty of our land,
Made fruitful by a cursed and banished hand;
Made sweet of tongue, without abiding-place.
And Nature hath remembered, for a trace
Of calm Acadian life yet holds command,
Where undisturbed the rustling willows stand,
And the curved grass, telling the breeze's pace.
Before the march of power the weak must bend,
And yet forgive; the savage strong will smite.
The glossing words of reason and of song,
To tell of hate and virtue to defend,
May never set the bitter deed aright,
Nor satisfy the ages with the wrong.

MORN.

Late Morn with drowsy eyelids drunk with night,
Still-breathed in slumber, slipped a glance
And slept again, veiling her eyes' delight.
Too deep the ecstasy of nightly trance
To break the power of a tender dream.
Faint music stirred her hearing till awake
Her glances silvered from her tardy bed.
Then wakefulness blushed with a warmer beam;
Life kissed her form and in her footstep spake;
And Day sprang up enthralled and ravished.
She fled, yet smiled from mounts and over glades;
Sprang through the forests and awoke the shades.
In vain his ardor; yet he chased and leaped,
In the fragrance of her distant tresses steeped.

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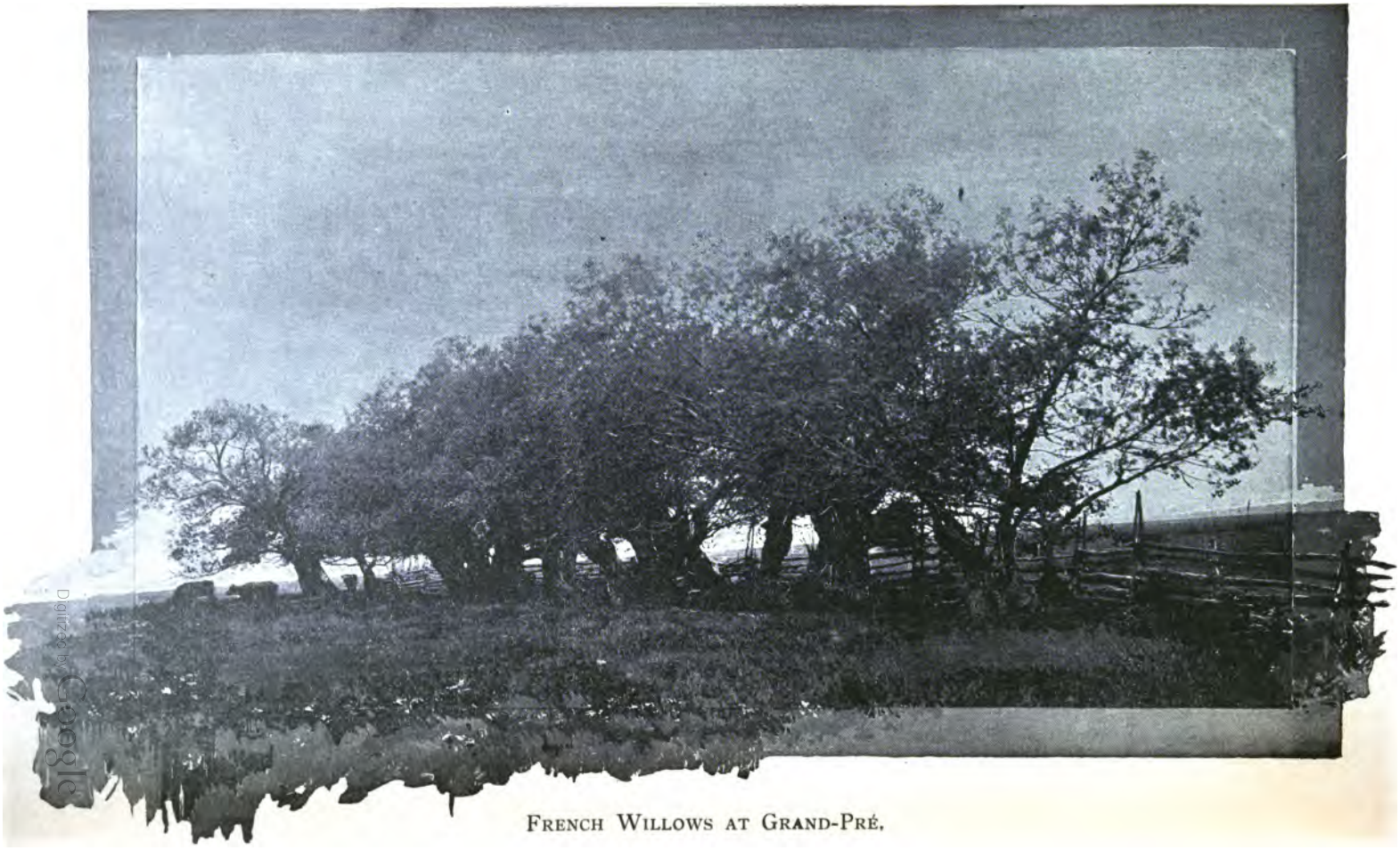

French Willows at Grand-Pré.

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RETURN.

Singer of hope and peace, soul of the dawn and gloaming,
What will deny us joy beneath the whole blue sky?
Never the greens of Spring; never the blossoms coming,
Soft with the breath of June when thy fullest song is high.

Never the sweep of the grain to the cloud-libation pouring,
Here where afloat and afield the season's reign is good.
Never the sea-breeze and land-breeze that takes thy song a-soaring,
Calmly as Dawn sweeps the hill, or as Night slips out of the wood.

Never the breath of fogs with a sail just in from the ocean,
Drifting with song and swing to the quay spray-wet in the tide;
Nor the sweet noon-rest from toil, nor evening's soothing potion,
Life just learning to live in the glories that shall abide.

Happiest singer of Spring-birds, each of thy lays seeming sweeter,
Tells to me over and over the things that have gone with a year.
Every rhapsodic strain slips eagerly fuller and fleeter—
Remembering, my answer is silence; my welcome, the joy while I hear.

What will deny us more when this virgin time is older?
Never the promise it makes of the loveliness yet to be:
Then will be strength of growth, and feeling deeper and bolder;
Summer abroad like a woman proud in maturity.

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None shall deny that I claim thee, just back from a winter of winging,
Here in the early morn thy throat is first to greet;
Giving once more to my ear thy richest old-time singing;
Making the silence stir; making the day-soul beat.

When on the ledge's breast the tidal heart is lulling,
Midday biding near, flushed with its own display;
When the lake is waveless, and lilies droop for culling;
Yet will thy note be sweet and joyfully fill the day.

Speech awake that was dead; a word come back that was spoken;
Love retold with a hope that brightens when almost gone;
So came thy early song like a strain from a string that was broken,
Stirring the dull of night with the hastening flow of dawn.

Calm with the truth of life, deep with the love of loving,
New, yet never unknown, my heart takes up the tune.
Singing that needs no words, joy that needs no proving,
Sinking in one long dream as Summer bides with June.

Often I listen and wonder, when gently thy warble is ended,
Whether a language is truer than the strains of a bird-made song?
Hath ever man sung as you sing, eagerly mellow and splendid,
Yet singing alone for the singing, unconscious how sweet and strong?

Uttering unconscious of rhythm, in waves of inspiration,
Full of the passion that guides and bids the song to swell;
Seeking no lover to listen to pleasure's pure elation;
Singing the whole true song, unknowing how ill or how well.

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Here is our dearest theme where skies are blue and brightest,
To sing a single song in places that love it best;
Freighting the happy breeze when snowy clouds are lightest;
Making a song to cease not when the singer is dumb in rest.

Flooding the loveless heart with a strange and unknown fire;
Warmth, and the passion to live making deep the theme of the song—
This is thy mission, sweet singer; so speak to the strings of my lyre,
Dull and untuned as my heart, till its music be awakened and strong.

THE MARSH.

The suns and shadows of thy seasons many
  Have not upraised thee from thy low estate;
  Nor made thy heavy pulses fluctuate,
Through quickening sunlight and long hours rainy.
Against thy side the sea's strong arm falls puny:
  Upon thy breast, vain is the creek's far flow;
  The measuring march of rivers' tidal glow;—
Only the sky can span, agloom or sunny.
When grasses wave, or all is wrapped in snow,
  There comes to thee no glad awakening,
    Beneath the flight of days and flow of tides.
The wafting wings that circle thee are slow;
  And seldom voice awakes the gathering
    Of days wherein thy purpose calmly bides.

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THE GASPEREAU.

Below me winds the river to the sea,
  On whose brown slope stood wailing, homeless maids;
  Stood exiled sons; unsheltered hoary heads;
And sires and mothers dumb in agony.
The awful glare of burning homes, where free
  And happy late they dwelt, breaks on the shades
  Encompassing the sailing fleet; then fades
With tumbling roof, upon the night-bound sea.
How deep is hope in sorrow sunk! How harsh
  The stranger voice; and loud, the hopeless wail!
    Then silence came to dwell; the tide fell low;
The embers died. On the deserted marsh,
  Where grain and grass stirred only to the gale,
    The moose unchased dare cross the Gaspereau.

THE RETURNED ACADIAN.

Along my fathers' dykes I roam again,
  Among the willows by the river-side.
  These miles of green I know from hill to tide,
And every creek and river's ruddy stain.
Neglected long and shunned, our dead have lain.
  Here where a people's dearest hope has died.
  Alone of all their children scattered wide,
I scan the sad memorials that remain.
The dykes wave with the grass, but not for me;
  The oxen stir not while this stranger calls.
    From these new homes upon the green hill-side,
Where speech is strange and a new people free,
  No voice cries out in welcome; for these halls
    Give food and shelter where I may not bide.

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CAPE BLOMIDON.

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MIDSUMMER.

The even-tide is hushed; and back to rest,
Along the moody hills where oat-fields sigh,
The dilatory winds waft sleepy by.
The day is festal in the curtained west,
And opens wide its halls and chambers dressed
In colors' splendidness, as if the sky
Gave honor to the earth's maturity;
While Night stands in the east with rayless breast.
Content fills every scene the vision takes
Unto itself. Its calm reigns everywhere
In fruitful luxury of field and hill.
There comes a signal-song, a frog awakes
And stirs the stilly dusk; then all the air,
As Night comes down, the chorus-pipings fill.

THE MICMAC.

How calmly flows the valley-seeking river:
No salmon leaps to tempt my idle spear;
No moose's answering challenge do I hear;
Gone like the otter and the wary beaver.
The air is darkened by the pigeons never:
Earth, air and water have no welcome cheer,
To bind me to my fathers' forests here,
Which to the axe's smiting vengeance shiver.
The hemlock leave the plains, the spruces die;
The partridge, like my tribe, among the hills
Are scattered. All alone my wigwam stands
Where once our children heard the joyful cry
Of the return from chase. No bow-string thrills,
For scant the game to call these idle hands.

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EBB AND FLOW.

Soft flows the tide to the beaches, swift with the gulls on the wave,
Reaching and climbing to inlands, soft as a prayer on a grave;
Curling through flag-margined gullies, pressing o'er flats of fresh green;
Hiding the glossy-red rush banks that sing to the currents, and lean.
Flowing in power and silence, pushing great arms through the land;
Whirling the ships into harbor, lifting the keels from the sand;
Ebbing away to the northward, southward again to the sea;
Baring the darkened rock beaches, slanting and wet sombrely.
Dark with the draught of red rivers the tide sucks into the seas,
Miles after miles lie dry channels drunk dry to the lees;
And mountain-born lakes, the children of clouds and of woods,
Wash the dark places till the turn and the coming of floods.
Sprung from the realm of darkness to look on the passing of years,
Amethysts purple the shore and play with the sea as with tears.
Moving again on the meadows, heaving in endless unrest,
Filling and falling as ever, the tide is a living breast.
Hiding the white-ribs of wreckage under the doom it has set;
Roaring the first oath of vengeance, weeping the after regret.
Seaward the ship points her bowsprit into the roadways beyond,
Dim and wave-broken and distant, to fortune and failure in bond.
High hangs the figure-head Hopeful, looking across to the shore;
Hopeful for ever, till terror fall dead in the billowy roar.
Tides and eternity linger not here, yet the fisherman's line
Hangs all day, his face in the wind, and his hands in the brine;
Night-time and day, in the clutch of the sea and the lumbering hours,
Where Fury abides with a sleepless hand on the leash of the powers.
A limitless flow, a limitless deep, and a limitless green —
Where is the finish of things to be, though the first hath long been?
Waters to ebb and flow in peace, or with storm to give tongue;
Life that will pulse; and themes by the lips to be spoken, unsung.

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A SHOWER.

The morn is moody and the clouds brood low,
  While a soft expectation fills each place
  Where grasses lean and flowers droop like lace:
The air is vacant, and no breezes blow.
The thunder for an hour rolled deep and slow;
  Then with the first cool gust that swept my face,
  From the dim west with quick increasing pace,
The rain fell round me with a rustling flow.

Earth sighs as the soft hand of heaven turns
  The draught upon her lips. Even the calm
    Blue hills stir musically in the rain.
The grass is waving and no flower mourns.
  From secret places, fresh and fragrant balm
    Fills every dusty road and hidden lane.

A VIEW.

Acadia's fairest scene lies here
Beneath the eye: a vale shut in with hills
Where slopes and groves are dark with hazy blue.
A sea floods in where cliffs and rocks uprear
A sombre entrance. The green ocean fills
Long rivers, days and nights, and days anew.
Just now the wind is still. A sail
Hangs o'er the distant boat in waveless stream.
The whole full-tide is smooth and pale,
And all the world adream.

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MINAS BASIN.

Into thy cup an ocean pours, and fills
  Thy great marsh-rivers where the ruddy stains
Mix with the waters of a hundred hills;
  And then with eager quaffing lip he drains.
Where sea-grass under every air-flow thrills,
  And stirs the level watch-ground of the cranes,
As on an altar, the sea's offering spills,
  Once to the day; once to the night that reigns.
On thy broad rim, the great Designer's hand
  Has wrought the fairest things of earth and sky;
    And made a wonder of thy mighty tides.
And a Romance is thine not writ with hand,
  Alive in every curve; and ne'er to die
    While o'er thy surface a winged vessel rides.

THE TIDE-SPIRIT.

From shore to shore the shining waters lay,
  Beneath the sun, as placid as a cheek.
  As one who does not hear, and does not speak,
Its languid arms reclined as if to stay.
But as I looked, I saw a ripple-play,
  And heard the whisper of a breeze afloat,
  And the soft waking of the tidal-note,
As the great waters turned to move away.
At night again I stood beside the sea,
  That clearer spoke, because the day was gone,
    And the loud voice of toil in sleep had died.
A murmur, almost words, came in to me;
  And then I knew the sea, never alone,
    Was coming with its spirit, side by side.

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WILLOWS.

Willows whisper strange, this noon, with green
And gentle wavings. Pools and shadows merge
Beneath the branches, where the rushes lean
And stumble prone; and sad along the verge
The marsh-hen totters. Strange the branches play
Above the snake-roots in the dark and wet,
Adown the hueless trunks, this summer day.
Strange things the willows whisper. List, mine ear.
Mayhap some story-wind would have thee hear.
I know the breeze that softly murmurs so
Hath sought this place, returning like the sun
To linger in the valley, where the flow
Of tide and season fills and falls; begun
And ended many a nameless year. Again
Unheeded and again unheard, a tale
May freight these dreamy breezes of the vale.
Unvoiced I listed, and I heard with pain;
So sad the voice, so sad the story told:
"Oh willow! true hath been my heart, and long
I waited for the bird with wing of gold
To mate among thy branches, and whose song
Should tell me of my love's return.
The branch he broke while yet my breast did burn
With all its love and pain. The vow
He uttered, 'Ere this branch we lovers set
Becomes thrice higher than thy tender brow;
After the yellow-wing her brood will get,
I will come back to thee.' My frequent glance,
A loving maiden left in Acadie,
Hath asked of thee, what keeps my love in France.
Thy branches all this while, from twig to tree,
Have been my hope; but now the tree hath born
A nest and happy two, and just this morn,
Ah me, they fled." This was the breeze's strain.
I lingered yet, but listed all in vain.

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Willows old and deathless near the fence
  Crooked everywhere, here tottering to their fall,
  Half-hid in golden-rod and grasses tall
Along the marshes. Winding-rutted thence
The road leads sea-ward where the anchor clings,
  And sein-poles split the eddy. On the hill
A lake lies blue. The swallow's dipping rings,
  And wavelets play among the leaves that spread,
Or sink cool swathed along the hidden trunk.
  Brown-skinned urchins 'mong the willows spill
Within the shade with pleasure drunk,
  Afloat in azure fallen from the sky;
Plucking the lilies, once the heaven's stars.
  Before the glossy hair is dry,
Late drenched like lily-leaves, boy skill prepares
  The willow pipe to speak a noisy note;
Or merman-like, with ringlets all afloat,
  Among the flowers joins the swollen throat
Of stranded frog, or drowns his song. Red lips
  Apart with song and laughter; eyes that glance
Into the sun; and pipes that play all day
  The tunes that come with happy chance.
The heart-song through the whistle slips,
  And like the echo dies away.

The breezes rustle with the old-time voice;
  The laughter lags, the pipe-notes will not stay;
We drift beyond the walls of yesterday,
  Where songs still linger and must long rejoice.
Sing, piper, on thy willow-reed sing clear.
Waft, breezes, wing me till my youth be near.
Sing, willows, shake my heart-strings into chords,
Intenser for the absence of the words.
Piper, breezes, willows, I am sleeping
In the heaven of your keeping.

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RETROSPECTION.

Why shall I curse until my tears are dry,
And read your story but to curse again.
Let history make clean the sombre stain,
Repudiate the deed of enmity.
These generations, in security,
Over the dykes may guide the peaceful wain.
In painless rest our fathers long have lain
Under an alien sod and alien sky.
Dear race, your love was deathless for your land,
Though punished with a blow that smote in vain
To crush it from your hearts. The world is taught
How strong is love that gave its yielding hand
Unto the cord; the love that was a bane
Embittering the cup where sweet was sought.

DRIFTING.

Voiceless, the hour drifts without a will,
And the noon tide lies sleeping on the sand.
No moveless helm needs a ruling hand,
Because there is no wind awake to fill
The sails that idle in the sun, until
A sighing breath shall come as a command,
Sweeping across the Bay; the ship will stand
Away then, every stick and yard athrill.
As yet, the tide's great heart is beating slow;
And like a beast that hath enough of play,
It drowses, near the things it yet may crush.
The wreckage splintered by the sea's mad blow,
And the new bark that left the shore to-day,
Are drifting through the noon-day's sleepy flush.

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HAYING.

From the soft dyke-road, crooked and waggon-worn,
Comes the great load of rustling scented hay,
Slow-drawn with heavy swing and creaky sway,
Through the cool freshness of the windless morn.
The oxen, yoked and sturdy, horn to horn,
Sharing the rest and toil of night and day,
Bend head and neck to the long hilly way,
By many a season's labor marked and torn.
On the broad sea of dyke, the gathering heat
Waves upward from the grass, where road on road
Is swept before the tramping of the teams.
And while the oxen rest beside the sweet
New hay, the loft receives the early load,
With hissing stir, among the dusty beams.

THE DYKE.

From dyke to hillside, sways the level sweep
Of all the ripened hay, in mid-July;
A tideless sea of rustling melody,
Beside the river-channels of the deep.
Astray and straggling, or in broken heap,
Where birdlings flutter, dark the fences lie.
Far off, the tortuous rush-grown creek is dry,
Where looms the leaning barn like ancient keep.

A Neptune cuts across the sea of green
With chariot-music trembling to the hills;
And as the horses swim the grass divides,
Showing to heaven where his way has been.
The sounding wheel that bares what Natures hides
Drowns the low nestling-cry, and ruthless kills.

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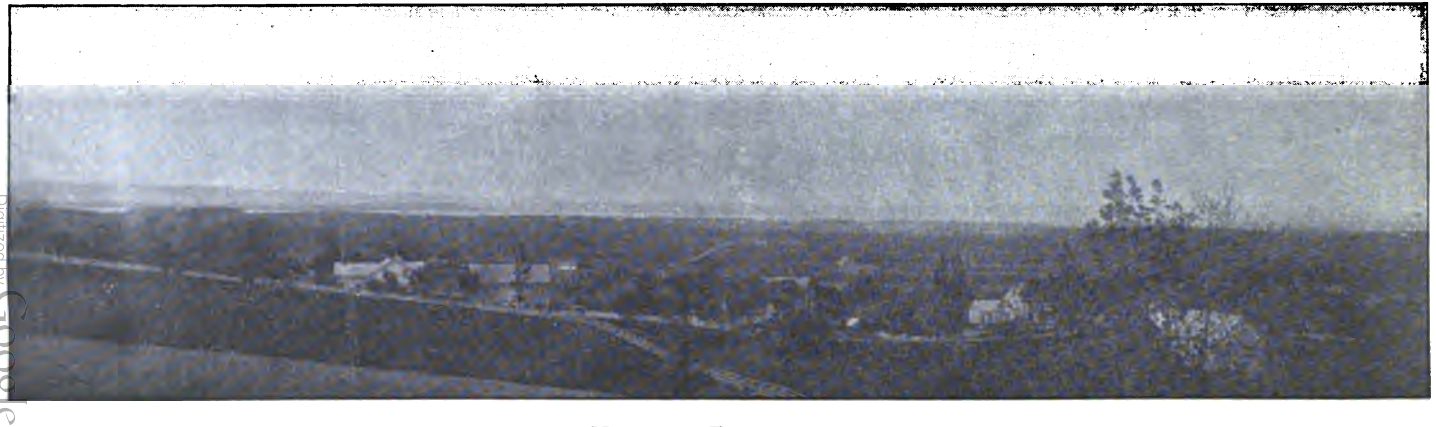
GRAND-PRÉ DYKE.



HOME OF EVANGELINE.

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THE NIGHT-MOWER.

In the soft dew-fall of an autumn night,
A solitary mower marks his way
With hissing scythe in the brine-savored hay,
Long ere the dawn is flooding into light.
While coward fear and doubting dim my sight,
I shame to hear the certain swing and play
Of the strong toiler's arm, or night or day,
Treading the hours through in faithful might.
Ever he glides with form invisible;
His ringing scythe oft filling the dark plain.
The moving murmur of the coming tide
Stirs the broad night, now full and palpable;
For wholesome pride and faith are mine again
Near the night-mower by the river-side.

THE SEA-HARVEST.

On the great sea-marsh where the eddies stray,
The mower strikes ere yet the dew is fled.
The salt-hay falls before his heavy tread,
Filling with odorous breath the whole green way.
On the tide's back, now with the broadened day,
Like a mild beast of burden slowly led,
The floating grass is meshed and gathered;
A great tide-harvest of salt-smelling hay.
Where herons stalk, and the shy mallard hides
In stillest haunts, is the man-worker seen—
Even the sea must garner for his good.
Soon high and dark above the marsh and tides,
Stand the great hay-towers; as they loom and lean,
Like turrets grim to mark the solitude.

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SCOWING.

From the marsh hay-fields, owned of sea and sky,
  Come the wet scow-loads, drifting with the tide;
  While fragmentary breezes curl and glide
Over the silver surface lazily.
With each dark burden builded broad and high,
  The laden scows lean clumsy, side by side.
  No ripples mark their passage; yet they ride
In to the creek's soft landing red and dry.
The tide-deserted creek glows in the sun;
  And the wet scows now stranded on the shore
    Gape dark and empty, near a loaded cart
Drawn by two sturdy oxen, white and dun,
  Which, as the evening reddens more and more,
    Bend to the driver's word, ready to start.

WILD-FLOWERS.

Youth and Beauty make a lovely twain,
  With smiles and tenderness upon their lips.
  So is fair Summer wedded as she trips
With Flora in her gardens, where sweet strain
The wind-harps make, and the soft murmuring rain.
  Like any eager honey-bee that dips,
  Is Summer with her tender finger-tips,
Unfolding buds to give her robes a stain.
And Summer loves them all, or dull or bright,
  The lone wood-flower, and the road-side bloom;
    Sprays fallen earthward from the varied skies:
The white of clouds, the gold of living light.
  These are her care until the Autumn gloom,
    When to her solitude she sadly hies.

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IN THE RAIN.

With the new hay, a dripping, scented load,
Comes the slow ox-team with a noiseless tread
Through the thick rain with bent, unswerving head,
Toiling along the soft and silent road.
Across the marsh the ripened hay windrowed
Lies all deserted, where the toilers sped.
The dyke-road winding to the leaning shed
Has but a solitary, hobbling toad.
Adown the wide and grass-grown village street,
The last dark phantom pair of steaming steeds
Leap headlong toward the open barn, with chains
That rattle louder than their rapid feet.
Until the tide has left the swaying reeds
High on the marsh, the morning through, it rains.

AFTERMATH.

But late I saw the mower's marching sweep
Lay bare and dry from upland to the tide
The whole green dyke. Even the bright hill-side
In scattered rose and golden-rod lay deep.
Swift wheel the busy birds of prey, and leap
Through the bright sunlight nowhere now denied;
Where thick and close the shielding grasses dyed:
And the full barns the sweet hay-odors keep.
Then night shed tears on the uncovered fields,
Lying in barrenness, a stubbly waste;
Where, like a raging fire, the scythe has been.
To-day the aftermath renews and shields
All the denuded dykes with kindly haste;
And everywhere again the plains are green.

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AFTERMATH.

August is hot in the flood of an ardent sun,
Lolling and still in fields and windless places;
Idle all day, like a woman with hair undone,
Her feet unshod, her bosom bare of laces.

All her passionate beauty and strength are here,
Complete, and grown to power beyond disguising.
Her flying days are short as the last draw near
And wane, September anear on wings uprising.

Hotter glow her burning eyes and harsh
Where the scythe has bared the grassy slopes and meadows;
On the breathless sea, and the stifled miles of marsh,
Where spruce and willow lose the cool of shadows.

Yet the dewy nights are sweet; and the lagging dawn
Awakes to the ringing scythe, like a heavy sleeper;
And the dyke-ward drift of the tide with the marsh-hay mown,
Drives off the cranes from the hidden creeks grown deeper.

As a tired troop of horses march in sleep
When the weary riders hear not, the sounding sabres;
So comes the tide with the flooding march of the deep,
Across the marshes to the winding rivers.

And a ship like a gull swings off the yielding clay,
And drifts with the fisher-craft from the nearer offing;
While the inshore flight of the gulls on the edge of day,
Startles the silent flats with joyless laughing.

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GASPEREAU VALLEY.

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As the sea drifts in, the toilers deep in the tide
Gather the grass, as fishermen drag the meshes—
Hunters surrounding the game on every side,
Till the spoil is captive in the binding leashes.

Trumpet-like, the call of the herds long-blown
Wafts mellow and far to the drowse of the sense's hearing;
The perfumes fresh from the marshy meadows flown
Bring taste of the tide whose overflow is nearing.

Still the meadows are the mower has shorn,
Where thistles stood, and perfumes fled from the flowers;
And the stubble stark where the summer's yield was borne,
Now seemeth dead to the sun and the touch of showers.

From the empty barns have the hollow echoes fled;
The lofts are loaded deep with the grassy sweetness.
The grain, ungarnered and ripe, swings lazy head,
And all the corn is bursting with its greatness.

Leaning hay-ricks dark rise everywhere
Across the meadows and the waters looming.
The higher tides flood the marshes unaware,
Among strange ways and newer channels roaming.

September comes to the bare burnt places and cools
With gentle touch and breath, a glad new-comer;
Refreshing the languorous lakes and dying pools,
Before the advent of the Indian-summer.

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Fragrant are the orchards ripe of fruit,
And fairest the flowers of September-bringing.
Songsters seem to be wording a second suit,
So eager and so joyful in their singing.

Yet is the primrose blown, and the thistle abloom
The August-flower bright from the bud, its month gone over;
Asters smile near the rushes' damp and gloom;
A sweetness lingers near the thrifty clover.

The season will not die, though all the dykes
Seemed to the roots destroyed by the ruthless mower:
Where now the cattle graze, and the marsh-hawk strikes,
Are the fields of aftermath of the secret sower.

YESTERDAY.

Sweet was the yesterday that came to me
  And brought the golden end of circling years
  Wherein were moods of anger, smiles, and tears;
The varied music of earth's melody.
And Nature found me ever at her knee;
  Bound to her beck, a lover at her side;
  Returning ever faithful, as the tide
Returns forever to the outer sea.
But yesterday is dead; and this new morn
  Hath light more golden, and a smile more sweet.
    And when she asks, my queen who came to-day,
Why all this loveliness of earth is born,
  I shall declare: to charm her wandering feet;
    To make her living bright, and glad her way.

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THE BROKEN DYKE.

From the far ocean, hour after hour,
  Inflowed the waveless and quick-rising flood;
  Until the marsh-reeds like a storm-struck wood,
Beneath the murky waters curve and cower.
The tortuous dyke-wall, crowned of grass and flower,
  That has a century of wars withstood,
  Leans hard to-night against the sea-front rude,
Awaiting the great current's fullest power.
In vain the strength and virtue of its years!
  O'er fence and furrow, through the broken walls,
    Across the verdant fields, the tide has thrown
Its torrent arms; and the awed listener hears
  Through the deep night the herds' harsh cries and calls,
    As the fierce ocean leaps to claim its own.

THE GRAVENSTEIN.

Horace, thou classic harp of rustic theme,
  Thy days went smoothly as thy facile line,
  For the kind favor of the gods was thine—
Yet such as this was even not thy dream.
Thy moderate pleasures found in many a stream
  Brimming thy cup of sparkling Massic wine,
  Of peaceful musing under branch and vine,
Had given thee all;—so did thy fancy deem.
This blushing apple fallen from the tree,
  Reddened and ripe to tempt my loving lip,
    Has nectar which a thousand groves afford.
Ah, this is wine of all the wines, to me
  The richest. While I think on thee, I sip,
    Mixing the sweet with thy immortal word.

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RIPE.

Mature with days of sunshine, warmth and rain,
As earth undrapes again to rest from toil,
The sheaves before the touch of winds uncoil,
Ripe-golden with the fulness of the grain.
The fateful lips of Autumn leave bright stain
With every touch, and breezes clasp the spoil
Marked by his kisses. The uncovering soil
Lies dark and dry behind the plow again.
Fruit-laden branches touch the grass below,
And road-side flowers fade; while bird and bee
Take warning and the scentless fields desert.
The season's work is done; her days are slow;
And like a thankful soul she bends her knee
Before that sleep which makes the heart inert.

WINDFALL.

All night, around the barn with vagaries;
Through leafy roads where branches stoop and swing;
Through orchard-lanes where the bright apples cling:
The fitful wind abated not of sighs.
It filled the orchards with strange revelries,
Wresting the branches with red fruitage strung;
A formless harvester who worked among
The laden limbs, till dawn came to the skies.
Bent with the fruit, green, golden, or ripe-red,
In all the fertile orchard-fields, no tree
But gave a fruity shower to the earth.
Now from the lanes ere yet the sunbeams spread,
From every path and road-side merrily,
Come the loud call, and ring of boyish mirth.

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CHANGE.

The early crows slow down the dyke-lands fly,
A sombre troop upon the heels of dawn;
While fog-thick breezes dim the morning sky,
Dark with the trailing skirts of night just gone.

The drowse of dawn clings to the early hours;
To the neglected scenes and gardens bare,
So fragrant late with plenteousness of flowers,
So scant of bloom, and silent everywhere.

The tide flows seaward as the day expands,
And the slow Autumn waking fills the day;
And when the fallen flood rolls from the sands,
There is no sign of languor or decay.

The season reigns with the soft calm of rest,
O'er the whole marshland in the sun's full rays.
Each night that earlier floods the golden west,
Each dallying dawn, comes with a newer phase.

When from the west comes a soft flood of airs,
And brims the land with subtle charms and sweet,
Then Nature's quiet wanes with all her cares,
And Autumn glorious roves with laughing feet.

She lingers long with Night, and bends her eyes
With every sun returning to the north,
Expectant of the white-clad cavalries,
And wan and wistful waits their coming forth.

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She stills the waking bud and reds the thorn,
And dyes the forest with a single sweep;
She looks upon the eyes of languid Morn,
And makes her coming late and calm her sleep.

Oft are the raging winds upon the plains,
Breathing decay upon the dulling land;
And wafting fogs, like cold unfallen rains,
Come with the tides upon the birdless sand.

The woods are stricken; and the parting song
Of birds yet lingers on the misty dawn.
The lakes are waveless-black the hills among,
And stiller since the laughing loon has flown.

But with the night again, through all its hours,
The waft of a cold wing sweeps o'er the woods;
And morning breezes thick with leafy showers,
Strew field and forest, and bedeck the floods.

Like thin-draped Poverty with bending form
Scarce hid beneath the tatters of her dress,
Appear the willows moaning in the storm,
Unpitied in their shivering nakedness.

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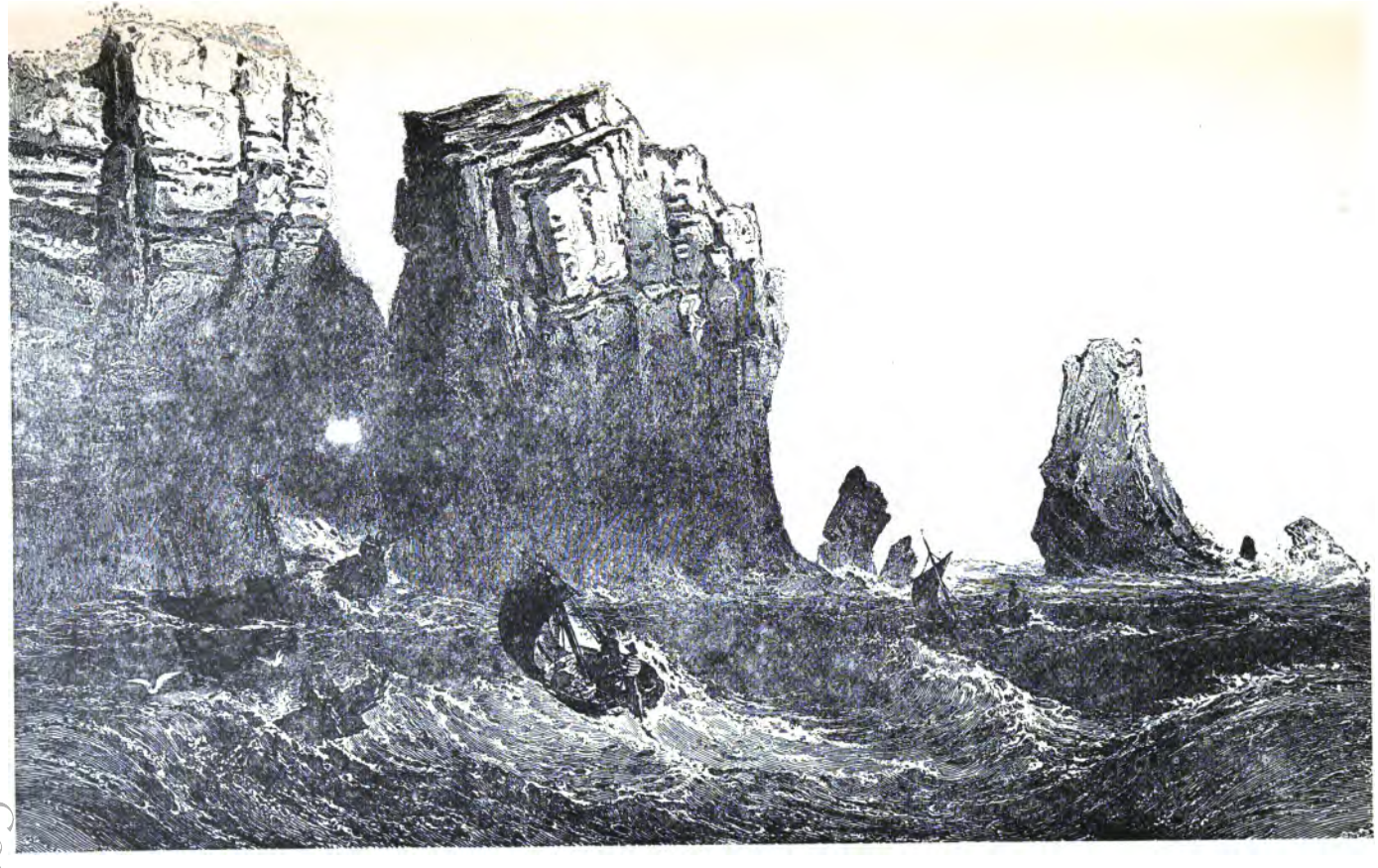

CAPE SPLIT.

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Again the night's far sky is bright with stars,
But a cold trance has stilled the breeze's breath.
Beneath the morn all stricken unawares
Lies the whole land in sombre robe of death.

What need of shade along these waysides now,
Of arching boughs, and eye-delighting green!
No longer noon-day burns the laborer's brow;
Bare are the vacant fields of fruit and sheen.

The harvest-day has left the orchards bare;
The nights are longer, and the moon runs low.
The eager hunter for the chase prepares,
To seek the forest with the moon's full glow.

The lofty hawk no longer meets the night,
Cutting the twilight with a noiseless wing.
About the spire no swallow curves in flight,
On calm, fruit-smelling airs of evening.

The gloaming has no bat, the gloom is dead;
No dreaming bird trills short a midnight-lay.
The heavens hang with frozen stars o'er head,
And chill until the coming of the day.

Where laughter rolls along the frozen lake,
The woods have lost the silence and the gloom.
While youthful blood is flowing joy will wake
Beside the sign of death and touch of doom.

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The time was good; the land may calmly rest
When Winter wanders through the silent ways.
The warmth of life again will move her breast,
To waken and restore in other days.

The seasons live their days of loss and gain,
Mild Spring like youth, and Summer like a queen.
Ripe Autumn has a brief and changeful reign
Ere Winter's snowy mantle sweeps the green.

These changes point to work that should be done,
And tell the sower where he cast in vain,—
Beginnings end if well or ill begun,
And with the thistle falls the ripened grain.

ABSENT.

Art thou fled, my companion? No echo remains in the shadows,
Sombre and still in the wood, of thy warblings tender and strong—
Where, by the lakes and valleys; where, in the forest and meadows,
May the lost singer be sought, without the monition of song?

Peace and its pleasure remain from thy lay of the eve and morning,
Given unasked, as the perfumes that flow and go wafting unknown.
Haply, some soul has received it, darkened with pride and with scorning,
Sweetening the spirit forever, in a way that may never be shown.

Beauty is swept from the flowers, and grain from the stalks that are broken;
Chill is the breath of the breeze, tho' the sun shone a summer through.
Yet, there is place in the heart for a word so long ago spoken;
Remembrances stay when the days go not back nor their labors undo.

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Harsh is the voice of the sea; and the fog on its face set with frowning,
Rolls away from the shore as with curses, not to return.
Well thou art silent and gone, here calm in the tumult is drowning;
Tenderness lost like childhood in manhood, sullen and strong.

Many a heart like mine for thee perhaps is calling,
For the places of light and song have become a solitude;
Where is thy summer of song that gladdened the sunbeams falling,
Filling the air afar, and echoing from the wood?

Southward thy wing and thy warble flit among branches and flowers,
Born with a passion not dead, nor to sleep with the end of a song;
Never to pause while the seasons garner the minutes and hours,
Frailest, and shyest of singers, shunning the dissonant throng.

Art thou forever gone; or soon to return to my hearing?
Never were fields and woods like the floor of our summer skies.
Teach me once more in the Spring; teach me to utter unfearing,
Sweet as thou singest ever, the songs that often rise.

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LEAFLESS.

From dawn to gloaming, and from dark to dawn,
  Dreams the unvoiced, declining Michaelmas.
  O'er all the orchards where a summer was
The noon is full of peace, and loiters on.
The branches stir not as the light airs run
  All day; their stretching shadows slowly pass
  Through the curled surface of the faded grass,
Telling the hours of the cloudless sun.
From some near branch, a crow invisible
  Breaks the warm silence with a mocking cry,
    And stirs the quivering distance of the day.
The startled noon awakes as from a spell;
  And from afar comes a soft melody,
    The melancholy cadence of a jay.

THE SOUTHERN VOICE.

Into the silence of this mural close,
  From the great hollow day, the noises float:
  The unseen crows anear that mock and gloat;
The rustling passage of the tidal floes.
In the dark south a voice of warning grows,
  Cut by the mud-team driver's urging note;
  And with increasing power the roaring note
Comes in, as of a beast that moans and lows.
The windless air is humid; and at rest
  Are the dark heavens to their hazy edge.
    A wordless premonition, I can feel,
Of snow that has not come; as of a guest
  Long looked for—even now above the ridge
    The air is filled with flakes that spin and reel.

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A HOMESTEAD.

(Winter.)

I found the fullest days of summer here
Between these sloping meadow-hills and yon;
And came all beauty then from dawn to dawn,
Whether the tide was veiled, or flowing clear.
To-day in snowy raiment nowise drear
Thou liest peaceful, as with hair undone,
And every jewel aside: thou dreamest on
Soon to be waked by the new-flowering year.
Old trees and walks will never make thee old,
For years add beauty to a peaceful age.
Thou art amidst all change the same, and strong;
Crowning the whole broad view that lies outrolled:
The mountain and the sea thy heritage
To keep thee beautiful; to keep thee young.

CANADA.

Thou land of promise, youthful and mature,
Fair Canada of legend and of song,
May destiny's bright star not guide thee wrong,
But make thy page historic, fair and pure.
Long shall thy hardy brotherhood endure:
As the sea fronted by thy mountains strong;
As the lakes are, thy gardens fair among;
So shall thy manhood be, both great and sure.
Move like a champion to the front of war,
To wrest from serfdom every neck in chains.
Cling to the ancient good; and to the new
Cry out with welcome as it comes afar
With love and strength; and in thy great domains
Give hand to all, but to thyself be true.

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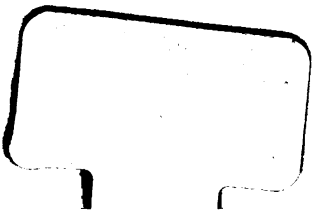

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